

## CHAPTER XXIII.

## FREDERIC THE GREAT.

*Frederic II.*  
 FREDERIC II. of Prussia has won a name which will be immortal on Moloch's catalogue of military heroes. His singular character extorts our admiration, while it calls forth our aversion: admiration for his great abilities, sagacity, and self-reliance, and disgust for his cruelties, his malice, his suspicions, and his tricks. He had no faith in virtue or disinterestedness, and trusted only to mechanical agencies — to the power of armies — to the principle of fear. He was not indifferent to literature, or the improvement of his nation; but war was alike his absorbing passion and his highest glory. Peter the Great was half a barbarian, and Charles XII. half a madman; but Frederic was neither barbarous in his tastes, nor wild in his schemes. Louis XIV. plunged his nation in war from puerile egotism, and William III. fought for the great cause of religious and civil liberty; but Frederic, from the excitement which war produced, and the restless ambition of plundering what was not his own.

He was born in the royal palace of Berlin, in 1712 — ten years after Prussia had become a kingdom, and in the lifetime of his grandfather, Frederic I. The fortunes of his family were made by his great-grandfather, called the *Great Elector*, of the house of Hohenzollern. He could not make Brandenburg a fertile province; so he turned it into a military state. He was wise, benignant, and universally beloved. But few of his amiable qualities were inherited by his great-grandson. Frederic II. resembled more his whimsical and tyrannical father, Frederic William, who beat his children without a cause, and sent his subjects to prison from mere caprice. When his ambassador, in London, was allowed only one thousand pounds a year, he gave a bounty of thirteen hundred pounds to a tall Irishman, to join his famous body-guard, a regiment of men who were each over six feet high. He would kick women in the streets, abuse clergymen for looking on the

*Early life of Frederic II.*  
 soldiers, and insult his son's tutor for teaching him Latin. But, abating his coarseness, his brutality, and his cruelty, he was a Christian, after a certain model. He had respect for the institutions of religion, denounced all amusements as sinful, and read a sermon aloud, every afternoon, to his family. His son perceived his inconsistencies, and grew up an infidel. There was no sympathy between father and son, and the father even hated the heir of his house and throne. The young prince was kept on bread and water; his most moderate wishes were disregarded; he was surrounded with spies; he was cruelly beaten and imprisoned, and abused as a monster and a heathen. The cruel treatment which the prince received induced him to fly; his flight was discovered: he was brought back to Berlin, condemned to death as a deserter and only saved from the fate of a malefactor by the intercession of half of the crowned heads of Europe. A hollow reconciliation was effected; and the prince was permitted, at last, to retire to one of the royal palaces, where he amused himself with books, billiards, balls, and banquets. He opened a correspondence with Voltaire, and became an ardent admirer of his opinions.

In 1740, the old king died, and Frederic II. mounted an absolute throne. He found a well filled treasury, and a splendidly disciplined army. His customary pleasures were abandoned, and dreams of glory filled his ambitious soul.

Scarcely was he seated on his throne before military aggrandizement became the animating principle of his life.

*Conquest of Silesia.*  
 His first war was the conquest of Silesia, one of the richest provinces of the Austrian empire. It belonged to Maria Theresa, Queen of Hungary and Bohemia, daughter of the late emperor of Germany, whose succession was guaranteed by virtue of the Pragmatic Sanction — a law which the Emperor Charles passed respecting his daughter's claim, and which claim was recognized by the old king of Prussia, and ratified by all the leading powers of Europe. Without a declaration of war, without complaints, without a cause, scarcely without a pretext, from the mere lust of dominion, Frederic commenced hostilities, in the depth of winter, when invasion was unexpected, and when the garrisons were defenceless. Without a battle, one of the oldest provinces of Austria was seized, and the royal robber returned in triumph to his capital.



Such an outrage and crime astonished and alarmed the whole civilized world, and Europe armed itself to revenge and assist the unfortunate queen, whose empire was threatened with complete dismemberment. Frederic was alarmed, and a hollow peace was made. But, in two years, the war again broke out. To recover Silesia and to humble Frederic was the aim of Maria Theresa. She succeeded in securing the coöperation of Russia, France, Sweden, and Saxony. No one doubted of the ruin of the house of Brandenburg. Six hundred thousand men were arrayed to crush an upstart monarchy, and an unprincipled king, who had trampled on all the laws of nations and all the principles of justice.

The resistance of Frederic to these immense forces constitutes the celebrated *Seven Years' War* — the most gigantic war which Europe had seen, from the Reformation to the French Revolution. This contest began during the latter years of George II., and was connected with the colonial wars of Great Britain and France, during which Wolfe was killed and the Canadas were gained. This war called out all the energies of the elder Pitt, and placed Great Britain on the exalted height which it has since retained.

Frederic was not so blinded as not to perceive the extent of his dangers; and his successful resistance to the armies which his own offensive war had raised up against him, has given him his claims to the epithet of *Great*. Although he provoked the war, his successful defence of his country placed him on the very highest pinnacle of military fame. He would gladly have been relieved from the contest, but it was inevitable; and when the tempest burst upon his head, he showed all the qualities of exalted heroism.

Great and overwhelming odds were arrayed against him. But he himself had some great advantages. He was absolute master of his army, of his treasury, and of his territories. The lives and property of his subjects were at his disposal; his subjects were brave and loyal; he was popular with the people, and was sustained by the enthusiasm of the nation; his army was well disciplined; he had no sea-coast to defend, and he could concentrate all his forces upon any point he pleased, in a short time.

His only hope was in energetic measures. He therefore invaded Saxony, at once, with sixty thousand men. His aim was to seize

the state papers at Dresden, which contained the proofs of the confederation. These were found and published, which showed that now, at least, he acted on the defensive.

The campaign of 1756 commenced, and the first great battle was won by the Prussians. By the victory of Lowositz, Frederic was in a better condition to contend with Austria. By this he got possession of Saxony.

The campaign of 1757 was commenced under great solicitude. Five hundred thousand men were arrayed against two hundred thousand. Near Prague, Frederic obtained a victory, but lost twelve thousand men. He then invested Prague. General Daun, with a superior army, advanced to its relief. Another bloody battle was fought, and lost by the Prussian king. This seemed to be a fatal stroke. At the outset, as it were, of the war, he had received a check. The soldiers' confidence was weakened. Malevolent sarcasm pointed out mistakes. The siege of Prague was raised, and Bohemia was abandoned. A French army, at the same time, invaded Germany; and Frederic heard also of the death of his mother — the only person whom he loved. His spirits fell, and he became haggard and miserable.

The only thing for him to do now was, to protect Saxony, and secure that conquest — no very easy task. His dominions were now assailed by a French, a Swedish, and a Russian army. His capital was in the hands of the Croats, and he was opposed by superior Austrian forces. No wonder that he was oppressed with melancholy, and saw only the ruin of his house. On one thing, however, he was resolved — never to be taken alive. So he provided himself with poison, which he ever carried about his person.

The heroic career of Frederic dates from this hour of misfortune and trial. Indeed, the heroism of all great men commences in perplexity, difficulty, and danger. Success is glorious; but success is obtained only through struggle. Frederic's career is a splendid example of that heroism which rises above danger, and extricates a man from difficulties when his cause is desperate.

The King of Prussia first marched against the French. The two armies met at Rossbach. The number of the French was double that of the Prussians; but the Prussians were better disciplined, and were commanded by an abler general. The French, however



*Battle of Rossbach.*  
felt secure of victory; but they were defeated: seven thousand men were taken prisoners, together with their guns, ammunition, parrots, hair powder, and pomatum. The victory of Rossbach won for Frederic a great name, and diffused universal joy among the English and Prussians.

*Battle of Leuthen.*  
After a brief rest, he turned his face towards Silesia, which had again fallen into the hands of the Austrians. It was for this province that he provoked the hostilities of Europe; and pride, as well as interest, induced him to bend all his energies to regain it. Prince Charles of Lorraine commanded the forces of Maria Theresa, which numbered eighty thousand men. Frederic could only array against him an army of thirty thousand. And yet, in spite of the disparity of forces, and his desperate condition, he resolved to attack the enemy. His generals remonstrated; but the hero gave full permission to all to retire, if they pleased. None were found to shun the danger. Frederic, like Napoleon, had the talent of exciting the enthusiasm of his troops. He both encouraged and threatened them. He declared that any cavalry regiment which did not, on being ordered, burst impetuously on the foe, should after the battle, be dismounted, and converted into a garrison regiment. But he had no reason to complain. On the 5th of December, the day of the ever-memorable battle of Leuthen, he selected an officer with fifty men as his body-guard. "I shall," said he, "expose myself much to-day; you are not to leave me for an instant: if I fall, cover me quickly with a mantle, place me in a wagon and tell the fact to no one. The battle cannot be avoided, and must be won." And he obtained a glorious victory. The Austrian general abandoned a strong position, because he deemed it beneath his dignity to contend with an inferior force in a fortified camp. His imprudence lost him the battle. According to Napoleon, it was a masterpiece on the part of the victor, and placed him in the first rank of generals. Twenty thousand Austrians were either killed or taken. Breslau opened its gates to the Prussians, and Silesia was reconquered. The king's fame filled the world. Pictures of him were hung in almost every house. The enthusiasm of Germany was not surpassed by that of England. London was illuminated; the gay scions of aristocracy proposed to the Prussian king to leave their country and join his army; an annual subsidy

of seven hundred thousand pounds was granted by government. The battle of Leuthen was the most brilliant in Prussian annals but the battle of Rossbach, over the French, was attended by greater moral results. It showed, for the first time for several centuries, that the Germans were really a great people, and were a match for the French, hitherto deemed invincible.

*Victory at Zorndorff.*  
Early in the spring of 1758, Frederic was ready for a new campaign, which was soon signalized by a great victory over the Russians, at Zorndorff. It was as brilliant and decisive as the battles of Rossbach and Leuthen. A force of thirty-two thousand men defeated an army of fifty-two thousand. Twenty-two thousand Russians lay dead on the field. This victory placed Frederic at the zenith of military fame. In less than a year, he had defeated three great armies; in less than a year, and when nearly driven to despair, — when his cause seemed hopeless, and his enemies were rejoicing in their strength, — he successively triumphed over the French, the Austrians, and the Russians; the three most powerful nations on the continent of Europe. And his moderation after victory was as marked as his self-reliance after defeat. At this period, he stood out, to the wondering and admiring eyes of the world, as the greatest hero and general of modern times. But, after this, his career was more checkered, and he was still in danger of being overwhelmed by his powerful enemies.

*Dresden.*  
The remainder of the campaign of 1758 was spent in driving the Austrians from Silesia, and in capturing Dresden. No capital in Europe has suffered more in war than this elegant and polished city. It has been often besieged and taken, but the victors have always spared its famous picture gallery — the finest collection of the works of the old masters, probably, in existence.

*Pope Benedict XIV.*  
But Frederic was now assailed by a new enemy, Pope Benedict XIV. He sent a consecrated sword, a hat of crimson velvet, and a dove of pearls, — "the mystic symbol of the divine Comforter;" — to Marshal Daun, the ablest of the Austrian generals, and the conqueror at Kolin and Hochkirchen. It was the rarest of the papal gifts, and had been only bestowed, in the course of six centuries, on Godfrey of Bouillon, by Urban II., when he took Jerusalem; on Alva, after his massacres in Holland; and on Sobieski after his deliverance of Vienna, when besieged by the Turks. 1



had never been conferred, except for the defence of the "Holy Catholic Church." But this greatest of papal gifts made no impression on the age which read Montesquieu and Voltaire. A flood of satirical pamphlets inundated Christendom, and the world laughed at the impotent weapons which had once been thunder bolts in the hands of Hildebrand or Innocent III.

The fourth year of the war proved disastrous to Frederic. He did not lose military reputation, but he lost his cities and armies. The forces of his enemies were nearly overwhelming. The Austrians invaded Saxony, and menaced Silesia, while the Russians gained a victory over the Prussians at Kunersdorf, and killed eighteen thousand men. The Russians did not improve this great victory over Frederic, which nearly drove him to despair. But he rallied, and was again defeated in three disastrous battles. In his distress, he fed his troops on potatoes and rye bread, took from the peasant his last horse, debased his coin, and left his civil functionaries unpaid.

The campaign of 1760 was, at first, unfavorable to the Prussians. Frederic had only ninety thousand men, and his enemies had two hundred thousand, in the field. He was therefore obliged to maintain the defensive. But still disasters thickened. General Loudon obtained a great victory over his general, Fouqué, in Silesia. Instead of being discouraged by this new defeat, he formed the extraordinary resolution of wresting Dresden from the hands of the Austrians. But he pretended to retreat from Saxony, and advance to Silesia. General Daun was deceived, and decoyed from Saxony in pursuit of him. As soon as Frederic had retired a considerable distance from Dresden, he returned, and bombarded it. But he did not succeed in taking it, and was forced to retreat to Silesia. It was there his good fortune to gain a victory over the Austrians, and prevent their junction with the Russians. At Torgau, he again defeated an army of sixty-four thousand of the enemy, with a force of only forty-four thousand. This closed the campaign, and the position of the parties was nearly the same as at the commencement of it. The heart of Frederic was now ulcerated with bitterness in view of the perseverance of his enemies, who were resolved to crush him. He should, however have remembered that he had provoked their implacable resentment, by the commission of a great crime.

Although Frederic, by rare heroism, had maintained his ground, still his resources were now nearly exhausted, and he began to look around, in vain, for a new supply of men, horses, and provisions. The circle which his enemies had drawn around him was obviously becoming smaller. In a little while, to all appearance, he would be crushed by overwhelming forces.

Under these circumstances, the campaign in 1761 was opened; but no event of importance occurred until nearly the close of the year. On the whole, it was disastrous to Prussia. Half of Silesia was taken by the Austrians, and the Russian generals were successful in Pomerania. And a still greater misfortune happened to Frederic in consequence of the resignation of Pitt, who had ever been his firmest ally, and had granted him large subsidies, when he was most in need of them. On the retirement of the English minister, these subsidies were withdrawn, and the party which had thwarted William III., which had persecuted Marlborough, and had given up the Catalans, came into power—the Tories. "It was indifferent to them whether the house of Hohenstaufen or Hohenzollern should be dominant in Germany." But Pitt and the Whigs argued that no sacrifice would be too great to preserve the balance of power. The defection of England, however, filled the mind of Frederic with implacable hatred, and he never could bear to hear even the name of England mentioned. The defection of this great ally made his affairs desperate; and no one, taking a dispassionate view of the contending parties, could doubt but that the ruin of the Prussian king was inevitable. Maria Theresa was so confident of success, that she disbanded twenty thousand of her troops.

But Providence had ordered otherwise. A great and unexpected change came over the fortunes of Frederic. His heroism was now to be rewarded—not the vulgar heroism which makes a sudden effort, and gains a single battle, but that well-sustained heroism which strives in the midst of defeat, and continues to hope when even noble hearts are sinking in despair. On the 5th of January, 1762, Elizabeth, the empress of Russia, died; and her successor, Peter III., who was an admirer of Frederic, and even a personal friend, returned the Prussian prisoners, withdrew his troops from the Prussian territories, dressed himself in a Prussian uniform, and wore the black eagle of Prussia on his breast. He even sent fifteen thousand troops to reinforce the army of Frederic.



England and France had long been wearied of this war, and formed a separate treaty for themselves. Prussia and Austria were therefore left to combat each other. If Austria, assisted by France and Russia, could not regain Silesia and ruin Prussia, it certainly was not strong enough to conquer Frederic single-handed. The proud Maria Theresa was compelled to make peace with that heroic but unprincipled robber, who had seized one of the finest provinces of the Austrian empire. In February, the treaty of Hubertsburg was signed, by which Frederic retained his spoil. He, in comparison with the other belligerent parties was the gainer. But no acquisition of territory could compensate for those seven years of toil, expense, and death. After six years, he entered his capital in triumph; but he beheld every where the melancholy marks of devastation and suffering. The fields were untilled, houses had been sacked, population had declined, and famine and disease had spread a funereal shade over the dwellings of the poor. He had escaped death, but one sixth of the whole male population of Prussia had been killed, and untold millions of property had been destroyed. In some districts, no laborers but women were seen in the fields, and fifteen thousand houses had been burnt in his own capital.

It is very remarkable that no national debt was incurred by the king of Prussia, in spite of all his necessities. He always, in the worst of times, had a year's revenue in advance; and, at the close of the war, to show the world that he was not then impoverished, he built a splendid palace at Potsdam, which nearly equalled the magnificence of Versailles.

But he also did all in his power to alleviate the distress which his wars had caused. Silesia received three millions of thalers, and Pomerania two millions. Fourteen thousand houses were rebuilt; treasury notes, which had depreciated, were redeemed; officers who had distinguished themselves were rewarded; and the widows and children of those who had fallen were pensioned.

The possession of Silesia did not, indeed, compensate for the Seven Years' War; but the struggles which the brave Prussians made for their national independence, when assailed on all sides by powerful enemies, were not made in vain. Had they not been made, worse evils would have happened. Prussia would not have held her place in the scale of nations, and the people would have

fallen in self-respect. It was wrong in Frederic to seize the possession of another. In so doing, he was in no respect better than a robber; and he paid a penalty for his crime. But he also fought in self-defence. This defence was honorable and glorious, and this entitles him to the name of *Great*.

After the peace of Hubertsburg, in 1763, Prussia, for a time, enjoyed repose, and the king devoted himself to the improvement of his country. But the army received his greatest consideration, and a peace establishment of one hundred and sixty thousand men was maintained; an immense force for so small a kingdom, but deemed necessary in such unsettled times. Frederic amused himself in building palaces, in writing books, and corresponding with literary friends. But schemes of ambition were, after all, paramount in his mind.

The Seven Years' War had scarcely closed before the partition of Poland was effected, the greatest political crime of that age, for which the king of Prussia was chiefly responsible.

The Bavarian war was the next great political event of importance which occurred during the reign of Frederic. The emperor of Germany formed a project for the dismemberment of the electorate of Bavaria. The liberties of the Germanic body were in danger, and Frederic came to the rescue. On this occasion, he was the opposer of lawless ambition. In 1778, he took the field with a powerful army; but no action ensued. The Austrian court found it expedient to abandon the design, and the peace of Teschen prevented another fearful contest. The two last public acts of Frederic were the establishment, in 1785, of the Germanic Union for preserving the constitution of the empire, and a treaty of amity and commerce, in 1786, with the United States of America, which was a model of liberal policy respecting the rights of independent nations, both in peace and war.

He died on the 17th of August, 1786, in the seventy-fifth year of his age, and the forty-seventh of his reign. On the whole, he was one of the most remarkable men of his age, and had a great influence on the condition of his country.

His distinguishing peculiarity was his admiration of, and devotion to, the military profession, which he unduly exalted. An ensign in his army ranked higher than a counsellor of legation



or a professor of philosophy. His ordinary mode of life was simple and unostentatious, and his favorite residence was the palace of Sans Souci, at Potsdam. He was very fond of music, and of the society of literary men; but he mortified them by his patronizing arrogance, and worried them by his practical jokes. His favorite literary companions were infidel philosophers, and Voltaire received from him marks of the highest distinction. But the king of letters could not live with the despot who solicited his society, and an implacable hatred succeeded familiarity and friendship. The king had considerable literary reputation, and was the author of several works. He was much admired by his soldiers, and permitted in them uncommon familiarity. He was ever free from repulsive formality and bolstered dignity. He was industrious, frugal, and vigilant. Nothing escaped his eye, and he attended to the details of his administration. He was probably the most indefatigable sovereign that ever existed, but displayed more personal ability than enlarged wisdom.

But able and successful as he was as a ruler, he was one of those men for whom it is impossible to entertain a profound respect. He was cruel, selfish, and parsimonious. He was prodigal of the blood of his subjects, and ungenerous in his treatment of those who had sacrificed every thing for his sake. He ruled by fear rather than by love. He introduced into every department the precision of a rigid military discipline, and had no faith in any power but that of mechanical agencies. He quarrelled with his best friends, and seemed to enjoy the miseries he inflicted. He was contemptuous of woman, and disdainful of Christianity. His egotism was not redeemed by politeness or affability, and he made no efforts to disguise his unmitigated selfishness and heartless injustice. He had no loftiness of character, and no appreciation of elevation of sentiment in others. He worshipped only himself and rewarded those only who advanced his ambitious designs.

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*Character of Frederic II.*

## CHAPTER XXIV

### MARIA THERESA AND CATHARINE II

CONTEMPORANEOUS with Frederic the Great were Maria Theresa and Catharine II. — two sovereigns who claim an especial notice as representing two mighty empires. The part which Maria Theresa took in the Seven Years' War has been often alluded to and it is not necessary to recapitulate the causes or events of that war. She and Catharine II. were also implicated with Frederic in the partition of Poland. The misfortunes of that unhappy country will be separately considered. In alluding to Maria Theresa, we cannot but review the history of that great empire over which she ruled, the most powerful of the German states. The power of Austria, at different times since the death of the Emperor Charles V., threatened the liberties of Europe; and, to prevent her ascendancy, the kings of France, England, and Prussia have expended the treasure and wasted the blood of their subjects.

By the peace of Westphalia, in 1648, at the close of the Thirty Years' War, the constitution of Germany was established upon a firm basis. The religious differences between the Catholics and the Protestants were settled, and religious toleration secured in all the states of the empire. It was settled that no decree of the Diet was to pass without a majority of suffrages, and that the Imperial Chamber and the Aulic Council should be composed of a due proportion of Catholics and Protestants. The former was instituted by the Emperor Maximilian I., in 1495, at the Diet of Worms, and was a judicial tribunal, and the highest court of appeal. It consisted of seventeen judges nominated by the emperor, and took cognizance of Austrian affairs chiefly. The Aulic Council was also judicial, and was composed of eighteen persons and attended chiefly to business connected with the empire. The members of these two great judicial tribunals were Catholics; and there were also frequent disputes between them as to their respective jurisdictions. It was ordained by the treaty of Westphalia that a

*Maria Theresa. Germanic Constitution.*